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King Hussein of Jordan

King Hussein of Jordan has been described as a prisoner of history and geography.¹ In fact, he saw both as presenting him with opportunities as well as constraints. In terms of geography, Jordan is a classic buffer state, sandwiched between more powerful neighbours: to the north is Syria; to the south Egypt and Saudi Arabia; to the east Iraq and, most importantly, to the west Israel. But throughout his long reign (1953-99) Hussein made playing off enemies and rivals into an art form to ensure both the survival of Jordan as an independent state and the survival of the Hashemite dynasty. In terms of history, Hussein inherited both the incorporation into Jordan of the West Bank acquired in the war of 1948-9 and hence of the Palestinian national question, and a sense of a broader dynastic mission from his grandfather, Abdullah. While his West Bank inheritance made political strife endemic to the Hashemite Kingdom, his sense of dynastic mission led Hussein to dream of a Hashemite purpose which was always larger than the boundaries imposed on Jordan. As Hussein described matters in private: Jordan had to have 'a larger future than a few thousand square miles of sand'.²

This sense of dynastic mission was founded on two pillars. The first was temporal: the raising of the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War by his great-grandfather, the Sharif Hussein of Mecca. The Arab Revolt provided a constant point of ideological reference for Hussein throughout his reign. For him it signified Arab dignity, unity and independence and the rejection of external, imperialist domination. Its antithesis in Hussein's formulation was provided by the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 which had conditioned the post-First World War imperialist carve up of Arab lands. While the Hashemites might be seen as beneficiaries of British imperialism to the extent that the Sharif's sons Abdullah (Hussein's grandfather) and Faisal had been installed respectively as

the kings of Transjordan and Iraq, for Hussein 'Sykes-Picot' remained the shorthand term for describing an externally imposed, imperialist territorial order which had denied the Arabs full independence. It was a formulation to which he returned at key junctures in his reign. So, on 6 February 1991, as an American-led air bombardment rained down on the Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait, Hussein warned in a highly controversial speech that 'the real purpose behind this destructive war... is to destroy Iraq and rearrange the area in a manner far more dangerous to our nation's present and future than the Sykes-Picot agreement.'³ Hussein kept up this theme in a series of speeches after the war, proclaiming the hope that 'the turn of the twenty-first century heralds the resumption of the Great Arab Revolt, an interpretation of history in terms of freedom not oil.'⁴ For Hussein then, the territorial order in the Arab world was a transient imperialist construct. Geography in this sense did not permanently imprison him or his dynasty.

The second pillar of Hussein's dynastic mission was spiritual, provided by the Hashemites' descent from the Prophet Mohammad via his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. This spiritual claim to dignity and leadership was reinforced by the Hashemites' status during the Ottoman era as the guardians of Mecca and Medina, the most holy Muslim sites. Again, this was a theme to which Hussein returned repeatedly, most controversially in the wake of the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Then, Hussein's request to be referred to by the title 'Sharif' soon after the crisis broke out was taken by both the Saudis and Egyptians to be evidence of Hashemite irredentism, the coveting of the lost lands of the Hejaz which had been conquered by the forces of Abdul Aziz ibn Saud in 1924, driving Hussein's great-grandfather the Sharif Hussein into exile.⁵ Albeit that Hussein protested bitterly that he had never once 'in word or in deed' broken his grandfather Abdullah's commitment through the 1925 Hadda agreement to settle the differences between the two royal houses and renounce

the Hashemite claim on the Hejaz, still the suspicions of his intentions lingered in Jeddah throughout the final decade of his reign.⁶

If these were Hussein's claims to a broader temporal and spiritual dynastic mission, his brand of Hashemite Arab nationalism also led him to stake out a clear position in the Cold War contest in the region relatively early in his reign. 'In the great struggle between communism and freedom, there can be no neutrality,' he told the United Nations General Assembly on 3 October 1960. Hussein went on to emphasise that he 'wanted to be sure that there was no mistake about where Jordan stands in the conflict of ideologies that is endangering the peace of the world'.⁷ In his autobiography written the following year, Hussein developed a coherent ideological case as to why communism was incompatible with the Hashemite brand of Arab nationalism.⁸ This encompassed both an opposition to communist atheism and the aspiration for Arab independence from any form of imperialist influence. From Hussein's own perspective, therefore, there was an ideological justification for his Cold War alliance with the United States. Of course, ideology in this sense dovetailed neatly with practical considerations. The US alliance served Jordan's security in two respects: through its deterrent effect on more powerful neighbouring states which might otherwise have sought to overrun the kingdom; and through the provision of financial aid which provided budget security, helping to remedy the chronic insufficiency of Jordan's domestic tax base.

Hussein's ideology of Hashemite Arab nationalism provided the compass which guided his statecraft through the dramatically changing regional landscape during the final two decades of the Cold War era. The year 1967 proved in this respect to be the most significant watershed in the whole of Hussein's reign. The defeat of Jordan which had fought Israel as part of the coalition of Arab countries in the June war wrought a fundamental change in the King's mental map. The key goal of his statecraft for the remaining three decades of his

reign was to reverse the effects of the war and to recover the Arab lands lost to Israel. In other words, his goal was to prevent Israel from using the outcome of the war permanently to redraw the map of the region. But, if Hussein was such a shrewd judge of the balance of power, perhaps the first and most crucial question which must be posed before considering the consequences of the war for Jordan is how did he come to find himself involved in the conflict in the first place? After all, at no stage before the war was he under any illusion about the extent of Israel's military superiority or the likelihood of an Arab victory.

The key to understanding Hussein's fateful decision to sign an alliance with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser on 30 May 1967 and to place Jordanian forces under Egyptian command lies in an event which took place the previous year: the Israeli raid on the West Bank village of Samu. The operation, which took place early on the morning of 13 November 1966, was a major Israeli incursion undertaken in retaliation for a previous raid by Palestinian Fatah guerrillas on Israeli territory which had cost the lives of three soldiers. The problem from Hussein's perspective was that the Fatah attacks were sponsored by the Syrian regime and beyond his ability to prevent. Despite this, it was Jordan which was the target of the Israeli retaliation which resulted in the demolition of a large part of the village of Samu and the deaths of fifteen Jordanian soldiers and one pilot from the Royal Jordanian Air Force. The situation was made even worse from Hussein's point of view by the apparent duplicity of Israeli actions in the period leading up to the raid. As he subsequently revealed in a dramatic conversation with US Ambassador Findley Burns and CIA Station Chief Jack O'Connell, he had met secretly over the previous three years with various Israeli leaders including Golda Meir and Abba Eban to explore the possibilities of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. During his exchanges with these Israeli representatives he had told them that 'I could not absorb or tolerate a serious retaliatory raid. They accepted the logic of this and promised that there would never be one.'⁹ To make matters even worse, the King had received a personal

message from the Israelis reassuring him that they had no intention of attacking Jordan on the very morning that the retaliatory raid on Samu took place. Hussein drew two conclusions from this extraordinary sequence of events. The first was that the Israelis could not be trusted. The second was that they were intent on undermining Jordan and seizing the West Bank.

It was this sense of fatalism which conditioned Hussein's response as the region slid towards war in late May 1967. The likelihood that Nasser's brinkmanship, involving the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping and the demand for the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force from Sinai, would lead to war left Hussein with what he saw as a clear choice. He could sign a pact with Nasser and face Israel as part of an Arab coalition. Or he could try to stand alone and face the probability that Jordan would be dragged into the war in any case. If he stood alone, he was convinced that Israel would try to manufacture the circumstances to seize the West Bank.¹⁰ Viewed in this way Hussein's decision to fly to Cairo and sign a pact with Nasser becomes more comprehensible, even if it proved to be the most disastrous choice of his reign.

Jordan's defeat in the June war was crushing and comprehensive. The loss of the West Bank deprived the country of a quarter of its cultivatable land and nearly half of its industry, accounting for almost 40% of its Gross National Product. In addition, the influx of 300,000 refugees to the East Bank posed significant social and political problems.¹¹ While the passing of United Nations Security Council resolution 242 on 22 November 1967 put on record the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory through war and the need for the 'withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict', it coupled this requirement with the need for 'termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.'¹² Hussein was willing to accept this 'land for

peace' formula, but as the victorious power in possession of the conquered territory the Israeli government's strategy by contrast was one of prevarication. Opinion in Israel was divided between those who saw the acquisition of the West Bank as a providential opportunity to incorporate 'Judea' and 'Samaria' into a Greater Israel and those who believed that territorial compromises might be made provided Israel retained a sufficient portion of the West Bank to ensure its future security. But opinion across almost the entire political spectrum was united in the belief that Jerusalem must remain a united city under Israeli sovereignty, making a deal with Hussein over Arab East Jerusalem, which Israel had occupied during the war, impossible.¹³

Hussein's attempts to explore the possibility of peace through his covert dialogue with Israeli leaders which continued after the war thus met with no success. In the meantime the internal situation in Jordan deteriorated, with raids by Palestinian guerrillas known as the *fedayeen* triggering severe Israeli reprisals against Jordan, a spiral of violence which served only to undermine Hussein's authority within his kingdom. By September 1970 the point of no return had been reached from Hussein's perspective and he unleashed the Jordanian army against the Palestinian guerrilla groups which by this time had become a state within a state. Much debate has surrounded the question of how far Hussein survived and triumphed in the September 1970 conflict as a result of Israeli support.¹⁴ The contemporaneous invasion of northern Jordan by Syrian armoured forces posing as those of the Palestine Liberation Army presented a direct and significant threat to the survival of his regime. However, while Israel did redeploy forces to its northern border along the Golan Heights, and carried out air reconnaissance over the invading Syrian forces, the victory on the battlefield was won by the Jordanian armed forces. Hussein himself remained wary of the possibility that Israel might take the opportunity presented by the crisis to seize additional territory in the north of his country. Hussein's fears were not unfounded. Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan argued

in private that 'if we go to Irbid [in northern Jordan] it will be difficult for us just to return it.'¹⁵ Opinion within the Israeli government was divided between those who saw the crisis as an opportunity to 'solve' the Palestinian problem by toppling the Hashemite regime and replacing it with a Palestinian state, and those who by contrast saw the survival of Hussein as being in Israel's interests since he constituted Israel's best potential peace partner in the longer run.¹⁶ In the event, the latter view prevailed.

However, Hussein's continuing efforts to secure the return of the West Bank proved to be of no avail. Most significant of these attempts was his United Arab Kingdom plan proposed in March 1972 which would have involved the Israeli-occupied West Bank being joined to the East Bank in a quasi-federal structure. The two regions would each have their own elected parliaments which would deal with local government matters, while a national parliament, presided over by the King as Head of State would deal with the economy, defence and foreign affairs. Hussein expressed the hope that other territories such as the Gaza Strip might also be brought under the authority of the Palestinian entity thus created on the West Bank. In private he was even more expansive, arguing that this 'United Kingdom' might be expanded to include other Arabs, an observation which the British Ambassador in Amman described as 'shades of the Fertile Crescent and Hashemite rule in Damascus and Baghdad.'¹⁷ Evidently even in the unpromising circumstances prevailing in the early 1970s, Hussein had not lost sight of his broader dynastic mission. His mental map remained a canvas on which Hashemite dynastic ambitions could be sketched, if not perfected.

In the event Hussein's United Arab Kingdom plan was rejected both by the Israeli Government and by the leadership of the PLO. It was also overtaken by events in the shape of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The outbreak of the war was a consequence both of the deadlock in the regional peace process, with the Israeli Government evidently content to sit tight in the territories it had conquered in 1967, and of the changing climate in superpower

relations. Paradoxically, the effect of détente between Washington and Moscow had been to close off the diplomatic options available to President Sadat of Egypt in seeking to recover the Sinai Peninsula occupied by Israel in 1967. Neither superpower was willing to take risks in Middle East diplomacy which might disrupt their improved relationship so matters were allowed to drift with Israel consolidating the territorial status quo. Only through launching a war did Sadat believe he could persuade the Nixon Administration to devote its energy to the regional peace process, and exert the kind of diplomatic pressure on Israel which might force it to make territorial concessions.¹⁸

Hussein for his part was excluded from the preparations for war undertaken by Sadat in conjunction with Syrian President Hafez Asad. However, through the activities of his head of military intelligence, Abboud Salem, who had recruited a senior officer in the Syrian army as a source early in 1973, Hussein was able to learn detailed information about the Syrian plan of attack. The king was to a large degree incredulous, believing that any renewed war with Israel risked disaster. However, he did what he could to avert its outbreak by warning Western interlocutors that war could come soon if no action was taken to break the diplomatic deadlock.¹⁹ He also flew covertly to Israel to meet Prime Minister Golda Meir on 25 September 1973, in what has been termed a 'fishing expedition' to see if the Israelis had any information which would corroborate what he had learnt from his Syrian source. The fact that the Israelis did not expect war only deepened the King's incredulity at the information Abboud Salem had received.²⁰

The outbreak of war on 6 October 1973 posed a significant challenge for Hussein. On the one hand, given the experience of defeat in 1967, he was determined to avoid Jordan's engagement in the conflict. On the other, as the war progressed, he came under increasing pressure to intervene and relieve the predicament of the Syrian forces which, after initial advances, had been driven back by the Israelis on the Golan front. Hussein's solution to the

problem was elegant. On 11 October he told the British Ambassador Glen Balfour Paul that he had decided that 'to retain any Arab credibility at all, he must make the gesture... i.e. despatch (in as slow a time as possible) [of] an armoured brigade to relieve the Syrian left wing.'²¹ The problem remained how to avoid a direct engagement with Israel as a result of the movement of Jordanian forces. Initially, the King communicated with the Israelis through British and American intermediaries, but as the Syrian front crumbled, he was left with no alternative but to call Prime Minister Golda Meir directly on 15 October informing her that 'Israel should consider the Jordanian expeditionary force of the 40th armoured brigade as hostile as of yesterday morning.'²² In the event, the Israelis did not directly target the Jordanian brigade during the remaining week of fighting and Hussein for his part, in contrast to 1967, maintained his refusal to place his forces under foreign command. As the war drew to a close, the US Ambassador in Amman, Dean Brown, wrote to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in appreciation of Hussein's skilful navigation of the crisis: 'he has played the game beautifully', Brown observed.²³ Hussein had managed to achieve credit in inter-Arab politics, particularly with the Syrians, at the same time as avoiding the destruction of his armed forces through maintaining channels to the Israeli government. The October war was probably the best example throughout the whole of Hussein's reign of his shrewd grasp of crisis management.

For all Hussein's tactical skill during the crisis, what mattered to him most was whether the war would be followed by a reinvigorated peace process which might lead to the return of the Arab lands lost in 1967. Here, the results were disappointing. The focus of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on the disengagement of forces in the aftermath of the war left Jordan out in the cold. Paradoxically, because of Hussein's restraint there had been no fighting on the Jordanian front, so there was no pressing need to focus on the separation of forces there. Added to that was the fact that the Israeli government remained divided over

what peace terms might be offered to Hussein, which continued to mean that no formal terms were actually offered. In the absence of movement, the competition between Hussein and the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, over who represented the Palestinians and who had the right to negotiate over the West Bank, came once more to the fore. At the Rabat summit of October 1974, the Arab states resolved that the Palestinians had the right to 'establish an independent national authority under the command of the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in any Palestinian territory that is liberated.'²⁴ Whatever Hussein's own dynastic inheritance, from now on the resolution obliged him to defer to the PLO in any future negotiations over the West Bank.

Nevertheless, there remained other potential outlets for Hussein's sense of dynastic mission during this period. The close relations with the Syrian regime of Hafez Asad which he cultivated with the help of his Prime Minister Zeid Rifai during the mid-1970s were not without their dynastic dimension. Hussein's grandfather Abdullah had cherished the notion of a Hashemite-led 'Greater Syria' which might incorporate Syria, Palestine and Transjordan and while this remained a largely unspoken assumption of Hussein's Syrian policy, he did on one occasion allow his guard to slip, telling US Ambassador Dean Brown, as noted above, that Jordan had to have 'a larger future than a few thousand square miles of sand'.²⁵

One clear element of community of interest between the Syrian leader Hafez Asad and King Hussein lay in their mutual suspicion of the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. The Syrian view was that Sadat had formed an alliance and fought the October War under false pretences, intending only to pursue his own territorial goals. With the post-war peace process seemingly stalled on the Egyptian front after two limited Sinai disengagement agreements, Sadat now took a dramatic initiative in the form of his decision to fly to Jerusalem and address the Israeli Knesset in person on 19 November 1977. His initiative cut across the negotiations which had been brokered by the Administration of the new US President Jimmy

Carter towards the resumption of the multilateral Geneva Conference, which had convened briefly after the October war in December 1973, then adjourned indefinitely. A return to Geneva was close, as evidenced by a private letter from Carter to Hussein on 30 October in which he wrote that 'I strongly believe that the time has come for us to move boldly to reconvene the Conference'.²⁶ Sadat was also aware that the resumption of the conference was a serious possibility, but did not want to run the risk that Egyptian interests might be subsumed in a joint Arab negotiating position. Hence his dramatic personal initiative.

From the outset, Hussein had serious doubts about Sadat's approach. It was not just the timing or the fact that the Sadat visit to Jerusalem had stopped the multilateral negotiating process in its tracks. The visit of an Arab leader to occupied Jerusalem had great symbolic significance, particularly for Hussein as a Hashemite. As he later told US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski: 'the visit to Jerusalem under occupation had great religious significance. My grandfather is buried there. He was involved in the Arab revolt against colonial rule and he died because he would not compromise. We lost Jerusalem in 1967 under Egyptian command.... The Sadat visit was a very, very big shock.'²⁷ The King's words perfectly plotted the visit's significance within the parameters of his own mental map. First there was the spiritual dimension in terms of Jerusalem's religious importance. Then there was the temporal dimension in terms of the reference to the Arab revolt. Finally, there was the spatial dimension in terms of the loss of Jerusalem in 1967 under Egyptian command. In every respect the Sadat visit transgressed a crucial boundary from Hussein's perspective. It is doubtful, however, whether the King's American interlocutor, Brzezinski, understood the full significance of his words. He more likely saw them more as a piece of special pleading mustered for the purpose of explaining Hussein's refusal to accept the consequences of the Sadat visit in terms of the subsequent bilateral Egyptian-Israeli negotiating process.

The main consequence of the Sadat visit, after a protracted period of negotiation, was the convening of a summit, under the auspices of President Carter, at the presidential retreat of Camp David in September 1978, which brought together Sadat and the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The goals of the summit from the perspective of its American hosts were to provide a framework for a bilateral Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement but also a framework for broader peace in the Middle East. The latter goal required a solution to the problem of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Given that Begin was willing to offer no more than a form of limited local autonomy to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, Hussein held a potentially pivotal position. It would only be with his cooperation that any transitional autonomy plan might be fully implemented. But even before the Camp David summit convened, Hussein had written to Carter on 27 August 1978 expressing his fear that Israel's intransigence on the Palestinian question 'might prompt the participants to issue a vague and uncommittal document of principles aimed at de-emphasizing the differences and inviting other participants.'²⁸ Hussein expressed the same fear in his final letter to Sadat before the summit convened.²⁹

In the event this proved to be an accurate prediction of what transpired at Camp David.³⁰ Sadat showed little interest in the broader framework agreement and focused his efforts on the bilateral Egyptian-Israeli issues. It was left to the American hosts to try to persuade Begin to accept a more expansive autonomy agreement. In the event, their efforts met with little success in this regard. The 'Framework for Peace in the Middle East', which was the second of the two main documents agreed by Begin and Sadat, left Hussein in an anomalous position.³¹ It called on Jordan to join in negotiations regarding transitional arrangements for the West Bank and Gaza and also stipulated that Jordan would participate in joint patrols with Israel in maintaining security. It also laid out a timetable which required Jordan to start negotiations with Israel over a peace treaty by the third year of a planned five

year transitional period. But Hussein had not been consulted about any of these requirements which, at the very least, made the agreement high-handed in respect of the assumptions it made about the Jordanian role. As King Hussein described the position: 'then came the agreement, a very limited agreement.... The role provided for Jordan under the Camp David agreements was that of a policeman, to ensure the security of who, - the occupied? We tried to keep as quiet as possible. But that is not a role we could play. What we wanted to know was what was the final object?'³² Hussein now came under strong pressure from President Carter to back the Camp David agreement despite its weaknesses. In a private, handwritten letter Carter urged 'I need your strong personal support'.³³

In a bid to pin down more precisely the meaning of the framework document, and also to play for time, the King submitted a list of fourteen questions about the agreement to US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who agreed to provide him with written answers.³⁴ However, the American answers did little to assuage Hussein's fundamental doubts about the Camp David framework. As he made clear in a cold letter sent to Sadat on 14 October, he viewed the framework agreement on peace in the Middle East as vague and any transitional agreement without a stated end goal as 'useless' since Israel would continue to change facts on the ground in the occupied territories through its settlement activities.³⁵ In a letter sent to President Carter on 31 October Hussein made it clear that he did not believe the Camp David framework was just or workable. Whereas the bilateral Egyptian-Israeli agreement acknowledged Egyptian sovereignty over the Sinai, the framework document left open to negotiation the future of the West Bank and Gaza. 'I believe there was no balance in this', Hussein wrote, 'particularly as the document dealing with the West Bank and Gaza was very explicit in its provisions regarding the transitional agreements and the Jordanian role and responsibilities in them.' In a damning conclusion Hussein argued that the agreements offered 'no definite answers to our fundamental concerns, namely the ultimate total Israeli

withdrawal, self-determination for the Palestinians and the return of Arab Jerusalem to Arab sovereignty.’³⁶

Hussein’s stance resulted in a rupture in his relations with the United States which might have had very serious consequences for Jordan’s defence and budget security were it not for a new tack taken by the King in his regional policy. The summit conference of Arab heads of state held in Baghdad in November 1978, which agreed to take steps to isolate Egypt in the Arab world, also witnessed the cementing of a new, closer relationship between Jordan and Iraq. This was founded on the close personal relationship between the King and the Iraqi vice-president, soon to become president, Saddam Hussein. Throughout the remainder of the Cold War era, between 1979 and 1991, this Iraqi-Jordanian axis remained at the heart of Hussein’s policy. While its initial *raison d’être* was the King’s search for budget security, with Saddam playing the pivotal role in negotiating and funding a pledge to Jordan of \$1.25 billion per annum in aid over the coming decade, the alliance was soon further cemented by the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the outbreak of war between Iraq and Iran in 1980. These twin events had a very significant effect on each of the temporal, spiritual and spatial dimensions of Hussein’s mental map. In terms of the temporal dimension, the King came to see Saddam as a champion of ‘Arabism’, defending Arab independence and dignity. A common theme of his speeches in the 1980s was that Iraq had picked up the banner of the Arab Revolt and was advancing in the vanguard of the Arab nation. According to Hussein, ‘we Jordanian have always been heirs to the principles of the great Arab revolution.... Our support for Iraq is an inevitable extension of our principled stands because Iraq is right and demands nothing but justice.’³⁷ In terms of the spiritual dimension, Hussein was highly critical of the Iranian Revolution, arguing that it represented a perversion of Islam. The Khomeini regime was ‘an anachronism and an insult to human rights, dignity and the true teachings of Islam.’³⁸ Worse than that it threatened a Sunni-Shia split, which held

‘incalculable dangers of instability, strife, bloodshed and disintegration.’³⁹ Finally, in terms of the spatial dimension, Hussein argued that revolutionary Iran threatened the eastern border of the Arab world. Albeit that it was Saddam Hussein who had taken the initiative in launching the Iran-Iraq war through his invasion of Iran in September 1980, still the King argued that it was Iran which entertained designs on Arab lands. As he saw matters, it was ‘the whole idea and attitude of Iran in this area that we are up against, that it can fragment the area, that it can dominate the area, that it can act as a strongman in the area, that it can threaten whenever it feels like others in the area....’⁴⁰

Hussein also found a justification for his stance in terms of the Cold War context. According to his formulation, the Soviets had backed the Iranian Revolution from the beginning and were its ‘most logical inheritors’.⁴¹ This was because Moscow would benefit most from the instability in the Arab world which the Iranians were aiming to engender. Hussein supported his argument with evidence drawn from his own visit to Moscow in June 1982, during which he claimed that Soviet leaders had suggested they might remove their remaining armed forces from the border with Iran, thus freeing additional Iranian divisions to menace Iraq and the Gulf states.⁴² Given that Hussein deployed this claim as part of a battery of arguments aimed at persuading the United States to abandon its neutrality and tilt towards support of Iraq at a critical juncture in the war during the spring and early summer of 1982, an element of special pleading was no doubt present in his approach. However, there was a kernel of truth in his argument that the Iran-Iraq war presented certain opportunities to the Soviet Union to enhance its position in the Gulf region. The Kuwaiti request for the reflagging of its tankers, which were threatened by Iranian attacks, delivered jointly to Moscow and Washington in late 1986 was one illustration of such opportunities.

One further aspect of Hussein’s support for Iraq deserves consideration here: how far it dovetailed with his dynastic ambitions? While for the most part these continued to lie

dormant during the 1980s, Hussein was always conscious of the Hashemite legacy in Iraq. Immediately after the revolution of July 1958, which had swept away the Hashemite monarchy in Baghdad, he had considered asserting his own right to the Iraqi throne as he was entitled to do under the terms of the recently concluded Iraqi-Jordanian Union.⁴³ While the swift consolidation of power by the Iraqi Free Officers who had toppled the monarchy, together with the diffidence of the Western powers, had thwarted his ambitions at that stage, his despatch of Wasfi al-Tall as Jordanian Ambassador to Iraq between 1960 and 1962 illustrated his continuing interest in building Jordanian influence in Iraq with a view to capitalising on any potential collapse of the regime of Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim.⁴⁴ Clearly, the King could not afford any hint of continuing dynastic interest in Iraq to cloud his relationship with Saddam Hussein during the 1980s. However, the Iraqi leader's honouring of the Hashemite heritage in Iraq through the renovation of the royal cemetery and the reading of prayers for the souls of King Feisal I and King Ghazi during one of King Hussein's visits to Baghdad showed that Saddam was aware of his sensibilities.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it was not until after the mid-1990s, with the isolation of Iraq in the wake of its expulsion from Kuwait, coupled with a significant distancing in his own relationship with Saddam Hussein, that King Hussein's dynastic ambitions in Iraq re-emerged more openly through his support for efforts to overthrow Saddam.⁴⁶

From the summer of 1982 onwards, the Iran-Iraq war remained deadlocked, with neither side able to advance significantly on the ground. Six years of effective stalemate ensued. In that respect, the conflict had something in common with the stalled Arab-Israeli peace process which was Hussein's other main concern during the 1980s. Ironically, the first key initiative taken during this period to break the deadlock in the peace process was also military in character. The Likud government of Menachem Begin sought, through a full scale invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, to redraw the map of the region again, eradicating the

PLO as a political and military force and cowing the Arab states into submission. The Israeli invasion re-awakened a perennial Hashemite nightmare: that Israel might seek to 'solve' the Palestinian problem by driving the Palestinians out of the occupied territories into Jordan, toppling the Hashemite regime in the process and creating a Palestinian state on the East Bank. This nightmare went by the shorthand euphemism of 'transfer', and was referred to under the slogan 'Jordan is Palestine' in the political argot of Likud politicians such as Ariel Sharon, the Israeli Minister of Defence who had orchestrated the invasion of Lebanon. As Hussein described the situation in a letter to President Reagan: 'Sharon's desire... is to drive them [the Palestinians] eventually into Jordan that they may be joined by others driven out of the West Bank and Gaza so that in time and with more Jewish settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories when the issue of self-determination is addressed the results would be guaranteed in Israel's favour.'⁴⁷ The result for Jordan according to Hussein would be the establishment of 'a docile Palestinian state' under Israeli tutelage on Jordanian soil.

In a bid to assuage its Arab allies, and atone in part for its supine reaction to the Israeli invasion, the US tried to break the deadlock in the peace process by launching the eponymous 'Reagan Plan' on 1 September 1982. This re-introduced the concept of a Jordanian role in the West Bank through formal Israeli withdrawal and the creation of a system of local self-government in association with Jordan. Hussein did what he could to coordinate a joint response to the Reagan Plan with the PLO, whose central role in any negotiations over the West Bank had been reaffirmed by the Arab summit at Fez between 8 and 10 September 1982. However, the pressures on Arafat both from within the PLO and from various Arab states, particularly Syria, alongside the Israeli rejection of the plan and the US refusal to deal with the PLO, made a compromise agreement between Hussein and the PLO leader unattainable at this juncture. Nevertheless, Hussein continued his efforts at coordination over the next two years, eventually arriving at a deal with Arafat in February

1985, known as the 'Amman Accord'. This appeared to offer a way forward by bringing the PLO into negotiations within the framework of an international conference, and proposing Palestinian self-determination in a confederation with Jordan. Hussein made it clear in private communications with Washington that he interpreted the agreement as meaning PLO attendance at the conference could only take place within a joint delegation with Jordan and that Palestinian self-determination would have to be within a state 'confederally united with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan'.⁴⁸

The agreement immediately met with criticism from all sides. Israel refused to negotiate with the PLO, while Syria once again took the lead in organising Arab opposition, mustering Palestinian critics of the deal with a view to toppling Arafat. Under pressure, the PLO leader started back-peddalling, attaching conditions to his acceptance of UNSC resolution 242. Hussein persevered in trying to sell the agreement, conducting covert discussions with the Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres twice in London during 1985, and lobbying hard in Washington for the Reagan Administration's support. But it was not to be. By the beginning of 1986 Hussein's patience with Arafat had run out and on 19 February 1986 he announced the failure of the Amman Accord with a stinging rebuke to Arafat: 'we are unable to continue to coordinate politically with the PLO leadership until such time as their word becomes their bond....'⁴⁹

It was at this juncture that Hussein's own dynastic ambitions re-emerged more clearly through the attempt to build up the Hashemite role in the occupied territories between 1986 and 1988 in covert cooperation with Israel. All PLO offices in Jordan were closed during 1986 and a projected five-year Jordanian development plan for the West Bank and Gaza was announced. Meanwhile further covert discussions took place in London in April 1987 between the King and Shimon Peres, who by this time had taken up the role of Israeli Foreign Minister. But the so called 'London Agreement' which the two men struck was undermined

by internal politics in Israel, in the form of the opposition of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and by diffidence in Washington, with US Secretary of State George Shultz refusing to take on the role of advocating the agreement in the face of Shamir's opposition.⁵⁰ The outbreak of the Palestinian *Intifada* at the end of 1987 drove the final nail into the coffin of Jordanian attempts to play a role independent of the PLO in the occupied territories. By July 1988 King Hussein decided to cut his losses, announcing Jordan's unilateral administrative disengagement from the West Bank and putting the ball firmly in the PLO's court to develop a viable negotiating position.

As the Cold War in Europe drew to a close at the end of 1989, tensions in the Middle East were if anything rising. The era of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union had direct, pernicious effects in the region from the point of view of King Hussein in the form of the influx of a wave of Soviet Jewish immigrants to Israel. Hussein's concern was that these immigrants would predominantly be accommodated in settlements in the occupied territories raising tensions still further and making the negotiation of Israeli withdrawal even more difficult. The decline of the Soviet Union as a balancing power to the United States, coupled with the consequences of the end of the Iran-Iraq war for Saddam Hussein's policy made the period 1989-90 one of great uncertainty in the region. There was much talk at this juncture of a so called 'New World Order' but in Hussein's formulation this was a largely negative concept. It stood for unchallenged American hegemony and the trampling of Arab independence and rights. Indeed, this was a repeated refrain of his public interventions during the crisis which followed in the wake of the 2 August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

During the first phase of the crisis King Hussein attempted to play the role of mediator between Iraq and the United States. But his position was widely perceived in the West and in most Arab quarters as being sympathetic to that of Iraq. With the failure of his mediation efforts and the launching of the American-led air and subsequent ground campaign

to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait, Hussein's frustration boiled over. In a remarkable speech on 6 February 1991, already quoted above, Hussein spoke with particular bitterness about the supposed 'New World Order' which would follow the end of the Cold War: 'the talk about a New World Order whose early feature is the destruction of Iraq, and the persistence of this talk as the war continues, lead us to wonder about the identity of this order and instil in us doubts regarding its nature.' He proceeded to lambast the role of the United Nations and the international coalition assembled against Iraq, particularly its Arab members, concluding that 'I say that any Arab or Muslim can realise the magnitude of this crime committed against his religion and his nation.'⁵¹ Hussein's speech drew a swift response from US President George Bush who wrote to him on 9 February asserting that 'your words exculpate Saddam Hussein for the most serious and most brazen crime against the Arab nation by another Arab in modern times....'⁵² But Hussein was steadfast in defence of his position: 'while I do not... question your right to express yourself in defence of your policies and objectives, I am not able to concede mine as a Hashemite Arab Muslim....'⁵³

One further footnote is worth adding here regarding the changed contours of the international order as the Cold War ended. The Gulf crisis witnessed Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev staking out a position which was almost wholly supportive of the US approach. Indeed, as Iraq began to target Israel with Scud missiles after the launching of the coalition air campaign, Gorbachev wrote to King Hussein emphasising how little sympathy he had for Iraq and urging the King to take a 'responsible and balanced position' in response to Saddam's attacks.⁵⁴ The attempt to distract Arab attention from the occupation of Kuwait through the instigation of conflict with Israel must not be allowed to succeed, Gorbachev warned. There could be no clearer indication of the changed circumstances prevailing in the region at the end of the Cold War than a Soviet leader warning an Arab client of the United States not to rise to the bait offered by an Arab client of the Soviet Union in attacking Israel.

The conclusion of the Gulf crisis left King Hussein more isolated than at any point in his long reign. The pursuit of the revived regional peace process, which involved the convening at American instigation of a multilateral conference in Madrid on 30 October 1991, offered him his only potential outlet. But Hussein's pursuit of the peace process, which culminated in the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty on 26 October 1994, was much more a question of long-standing conviction on his part, facilitated by the changed circumstances prevailing in the region after the end of the Cold War, than mere necessity. Looking back over the course he had charted through the final two decades of the Cold War era, it is clear that he had been guided throughout by the three key parameters of his mental map: spiritual in the form of the particular destiny of the Hashemites as descendants of the Prophet and custodians of the holy shrines of Islam to provide leadership; temporal in the form of the legacy of the Arab Revolt and its symbolism for Arab dignity and independence; and spatial in terms of the drive to retrieve the Arab lands lost in 1967. While his statecraft was characterised for the most part more by striving than achieving, that was perhaps ultimately more a measure of his ambitions than his accomplishments.

¹ 'Death of a King: Cautious King Took Risks in Straddling Two Worlds', by Judith Miller, *New York Times*, 8 February 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1114.html> (accessed 5 February 2015)

² Brown to Kissinger, 2 June 1976, Amman telegram no.2954, NSA Country File Middle East/South Asia, Box 23, Folder – Jordan State Dept Telegrams to SecState Nodis (26), Gerald R. Ford Presidential Papers [hereafter GRFP].

³ Address to the Nation by His Majesty King Hussein, Amman, 6 February 1991, document XII, *White Paper: Jordan and the Gulf Crisis, August 1990 – March 1991* (Amman: Government of Jordan, 1991), 62.

⁴ 'King Hussein Addresses Human Rights Center Committee', Foreign Broadcast Information Service [hereafter FBIS]-NES-93-029, 16 February 1993, 47. See also Mufti, M., 'A King's Art: Dynastic Ambition and State Interest in Hussein's Jordan', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 13/3, 2002, p.18, for discussion of this theme.

⁵ Robins, P., *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge, 2004), p.178; Khaled bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, (London, 1995), pp.181, 210.

⁶ King Hussein to Prime Minister John Major, 20 May 1992, British File, Royal Hashemite Archive, Basman Palace, Amman [hereafter RHA].

⁷ For the full text of Hussein's speech see his autobiography, Hussein bin Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head* (London, 1962), pp. 200–7.

⁸ Hussein bin Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head* (London, 1962).

⁹ Amman to State, telegram no.1457, 11 December 1966, Folder Jordan Memos Vol.III 12/66-5/67, Box 146, NSF: Country File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. For further discussion of the implications of the Samu raid see: Bunch, C. L., 'Strike at Samu: Jordan, Israel, the United States, and the Origins of the Six Day War', *Diplomatic History*, 32/1 (2008, 55-76; Shemesh, M., 'The IDF Raid on Samu: the Turning Point in Jordan's Relations with Israel and the West Bank Palestinians', *Israel Studies*, 7/1 (2002), pp.139-67.

¹⁰ Mutawi, S., *Jordan in the 1967 War* (Cambridge, 1987), p.103.

¹¹ Ibid, pp.163-80.

¹² United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, quoted from Lall, A., *The UN and the Middle East Crisis, 1967* (New York, 1968), 308-9.

¹³ For further discussion of Israeli views in general at this juncture see Raz, A., *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* (New Haven, 2012).

¹⁴ For further discussion of this question see: Ashton, N., 'Pulling the Strings King Hussein's Role in the Crisis of 1970 in Jordan', *The International History Review*, 28/1, No.1 (2006); Little, D., 'A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer? The United States, King Hussein and Jordan, 1953-1970', *International History Review*, 17/3 (1995); Rubinovitz, Z., 'Blue and White 'Black September': Israel's Role in the Jordan Crisis of 1970', *International History Review*, 32/4, (2010).

¹⁵ Quoted in Zak, M., 'Israel and Jordan: Strategically Bound', *Israel Affairs*, 3/1, 1996, p.59.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.48-9.

¹⁷ Amman to FCO, 'United Kingdom of Jordan and Palestine', 9 March 1972, PREM15/1764, The United Kingdom National Archives [hereafter TNA]. Hussein's private files contain copies of the plan despatched to key Arab leaders: see for example Hussein to Asad, 13 March 1972, Syria File, RHA.

¹⁸ The case regarding the relationship between détente and Sadat's decision to launch the war has been forcefully argued by Craig Daigle in *The Limits of Détente: the United States, the Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-73* (New Haven, 2012).

¹⁹ See for example his warning to British Prime Minister Edward Heath in 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and His Majesty King Hussein bin Talal', 12 July 1973, FCO93/97, TNA.

²⁰ O'Connell, J., and Loeb, V., *King's Counsel: A Memoir of War, Espionage and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York, 2011), pp.122-5; Ashton, N., *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (New Haven and London, 2008), pp.171-4.

²¹ Amman to FCO, 11 October 1973, PREM15/1765, TNA.

²² State to Amman, 1815Z, 15 October 1973, NSC, Country File, Middle East, Box 618, Folder Jordan Vol. IX, Jan-Oct 1973, Richard Nixon Presidential Papers.

²³ Amman to State, 27 October 1973, *ibid.*

²⁴ Abu Odeh, A., *Jordanians, Palestinians and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process*, (Washington DC, 1999) p.210.

²⁵ Brown to Kissinger, 2 June 1976, Amman telegram no.2954, NSA Country File Middle East/South Asia, Box 23, Folder – Jordan State Dept Telegrams to SecState Nodis (26), GRFP.

²⁶ Carter to Hussein, 30 October 1977, President Carter File, RHA.

²⁷ Brzezinski, meeting with King Hussein, 18 March 1979, (7)NSA Brzezinski, Subject File, Box 33, Folder Memcons Brzezinski, 3-6/79, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library [hereafter JCL].

²⁸ Hussein to Carter, 27 August 1978, President Carter File, RHA.

²⁹ Hussein to Sadat, 23 August 1978, Egypt File, RHA.

³⁰ For detailed records of the discussions at Camp David see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-80, Volume IX, Arab-Israeli Dispute, August 1978-December 1980*, (Washington DC, 2014), documents 30-51, pp.105-95.

³¹ For the text of this document see Quandt, W. B., *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington D.C., 1986), appendix G, pp.376-81.

³² Brzezinski, meeting with King Hussein, 18 March 1979, (7)NSA Brzezinski, Subject File, Box 33, Folder Memcons Brzezinski, 3-6/79, JCL.

³³ Carter to Hussein, 19 September 1978, President Carter File, RHA.

³⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, pp.264-6, 388-96; Vance, C., *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York, 1983), pp.229-31.

³⁵ Hussein to Sadat, 14 October 1978, Egypt File, RHA.

³⁶ Hussein to Carter, 31 October 1978, President Carter File, RHA.

³⁷ Text of King Hussein's 'Pan-Arab' speech, 6 October 1980, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* [hereafter FBIS], MEA-80-196, F1-4, Vol.V, No. 196, 7 October 1980.

³⁸ Hussein to Reagan, 15 February 1982, President Reagan File, RHA.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ King Hussein interview, Amman Domestic Television Service, 8 October 1980, FBIS-MEA-80-198, 9 October 1980, Vol.V, No.198, F4.

⁴¹ Hussein to Reagan, 18 May 1982, President Reagan File, RHA.

⁴² Hussein to Reagan, 4 July 1982, *ibid.*

⁴³ For further discussion see Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan*, pp.74-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.87-90. On Tall's role more generally see Susser, A., *On Both Banks of the Jordan: A Political Biography of Wasfi al-Tall* (London, 1994).

⁴⁵ Baram, A., 'Baathi Iraq and Hashemite Jordan: From Hostility to Alignment', *Middle East Journal*, 45/1 (1991), p.64.

⁴⁶ For further discussion of Hussein's approach at this juncture see Ashton, *King Hussein*, pp.336-47.

⁴⁷ Hussein to Reagan, 22 June 1982, President Reagan File, RHA.

⁴⁸ 'A Proposal for Joint Action', with attachment 'Our Interpretation of Articles Two and Five', 11 February 1985, President Reagan File, RHA.

⁴⁹ Hussein's speech quoted in Madfai, M., *Jordan, the United States and the Middle East Peace Process* (Cambridge, 1993), p.176.

⁵⁰ For further discussion of the London Agreement see: Peres, S., *Battling for Peace* (London, 1996), pp.356-61; Shultz, G., *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York, 1993), pp.938-43; Shlaim, A., *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein of Jordan in War and Peace* (London, 2007), pp.440-52.

⁵¹ Address to the Nation by His Majesty King Hussein, Amman, 6 February 1991, document XII, *White Paper: Jordan and the Gulf Crisis, August 1990 – March 1991* (Amman: Government of Jordan, 1991), pp.61-6.

⁵² Bush to Hussein, 9 February 1991, document no. CK3100554218, *Declassified Documents Reference System*.

⁵³ Hussein to Bush, 16 February 1991, President Bush File, RHA.

⁵⁴ Gorbachev to Hussein, 18 January 1991, Soviet File, RHA.